

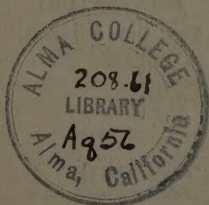
ON THE WAYS OF GOD

On the Ways of God

Translated from the
DE MORIBUS DIVINIS
(OPUSCULUM LXII)

of
ST THOMAS AQUINAS

by
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Of the Order of Preachers



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PREFACE

THIS little work, *On the Ways of God*, is a translation of *De Moribus Divinis*, usually attributed to St Thomas Aquinas. It is Opusculum LXII among the opuscula in the Roman edition of St Thomas's works published by order of St Pius V in 1570.

Even if it be not from the hand of the Angelic Doctor, it is, nevertheless, a faithful interpretation of his teaching, and, in the nobility of its thought and the ingenuity of its expression, it is not unworthy of his great name.

The book is a commentary on the words of our Lord: *Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect*. It contrasts the perfect ways of God with the imperfect ways of men, and exhorts men to imitate God and, according to their power, to become doers of the works of God.

Perfection or the consummate love of God should be the aim and ideal of all Christians, the holiest of whom will never exhaust its infinite possibilities. For, as St Thomas says elsewhere (II-II, Q. iv, art. 1), "Charity, by reason of its very nature, hath no limit to its increase; because it is a certain participation in the Infinite Charity which is the Holy Ghost."

BERNARD DELANY, O P.

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ON THE WAYS OF GOD

Opusculum LXII of St. Thomas
Aquinas

Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect.—Matt. v. 48.

HOLY Scripture never counsels or commands what is impossible. In these words the Lord Jesus does not lay upon us as a strict command to do the very deeds and works of God, which no one can perfectly achieve; but he invites us to strive to approach them and to imitate them to the best of our ability. This we can and ought to do, with the help of grace. For nothing is more fitting, says John the Bishop, than that a man should imitate his Creator, and according to the measure of his power become a doer of the works of God.

I. GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE

It is one of the ways or perfections of God to be unchangeable. He himself bears witness to this truth in the prophet Malachias (iii 6): *For I am the Lord and I change not*; and in St James (i 17): *Every best and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration.* Hence all created things bear the mark of unchangeableness; thus an angel, the soul, the heavens, and the four elements, are unchangeable in

their essence. And if sometimes he sends his angels, and sometimes does not send them, if sometimes he withholds grace from men, and sometimes gives it, if sometimes he avenges sin, and sometimes overlooks it, this fickleness is in creatures, and by no means in the Creator. Most of all will the unchangeableness of his decrees be manifested at the last day concerning the good and bad, when he will grant to the good a reward beyond their merits, and to the bad a punishment far beneath their deserts.

Thus should we strive after constancy of mind, so that, when broken by adversity or allured by prosperity, we may never swerve from the way of righteousness; but may say with holy Job (xxvii 6): *My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake*; and with the Apostle (Rom. viii 38, 39): *For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God.*

But alas! we are exceedingly inconstant in holy meditations, in ordered love, in security of conscience and in an upright will. How suddenly we change from good to evil, from hope into unfounded fear; from joy into groundless sorrow; from silence to loquacity; from seriousness into frivolity; from charity to rancour and envy; from fervour to weariness; from humility into vainglory and pride; from meekness into anger; from spiritual gladness and holy affection to base and carnal love. Hardly ever do we remain

an instant in the same state unless perchance we are constant in inconstancy, in ingratitude, in faults, in imperfections, in waste of time, in frivolity and in disordered thoughts and affections. The instability of our external senses and members only reveals the fever and ferment within.

We should then strive without ceasing to acquire constancy and stability of soul, so that in every step we take and every word we utter we may act wisely, sweetly and well.

II. THE GOOD IS PLEASING TO GOD

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that every good by its very nature is pleasing to him, at every time and in every place, whether it be the good in angels, or in men, or in other creatures: goods of the body, such as beauty, strength, graciousness, or the bloom of manly perfection; goods of the soul, such as perspicacity of mind, a retentive memory, a subtle intelligence, natural good will or free will used aright; natural gifts, such as the ability to read well, to sing well, to preach well, to be eloquent, continent, sober, and to have the mastery over one's self; lastly, the supernatural gifts of grace which please God pre-eminently, such as faith, hope, love, humility, patience, obedience, mercy, truth, temperance, justice, prudence, and knowledge.

Likewise all evil displeases him, always and everywhere and in everybody. Even as justice is the foe of injustice, and

uncleanness contrary to cleanness, so is all evil opposed to the divine Goodness, because it lessens or destroys the good which the good God has by grace conferred upon nature.

So, too, all that is good should be pleasing to us, always and everywhere and in every creature. We should sedulously guard and cherish what is good and strenuously resist all who attack it. From the depth of our hearts we should loathe and detest what is evil, always and everywhere; and we should, as far as we can, check it as something insulting to God and harmful to our fellows; but much more because it is an outrage to the Creator than because it is a peril to men.

But alas! too often it is the reverse that happens. For when we evince sadness because someone is praised or loved for his humility, his piety, his devotion, his preaching, or for some other gift, what else do we show except that good is displeasing to us? Or when we converse with those that speak evilly, countenance detractors, jeer with those that jeer, and secretly rejoice with those who commit frivolities or sins, what else are we doing except bearing witness to the fact that evil things do not displease us?

III. GOD FORESEES EVERYTHING

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he foresees with prudence all future things, good and ill. He knows

all things before they happen, and he discerns the good and the evil that will arise therefrom. He foresaw the fall of the angels and the fall of the first man. He allowed him to be tempted, and he knew beforehand all the evil that would follow for the human race, and he knew also all the good that would flow therefrom: chiefly, the Incarnation of the Son of God, by which man was to receive a more excellent glory than he had before the fall.

We, too, should foresee all our words, works and desires, the good and the evil they may cause to us, the scandal or help they may occasion to others. We, too, should have forethought about temptations that may assail us in the future, whether they come from demons or men, from friend or foe: we should take thought how they are to be resisted, borne with, or avoided, because the fiery darts wound less when they are foreseen; and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. It is well to look forward to what will happen when the soul is separated from the body, to realise what pain will rack the body, what fear will swamp the soul, what dread peril will encompass man. Also we must foresee and decide where our abiding place shall be—with God or with the devil, in heaven or in hell. It is well beforehand to reflect and turn over in our minds the unspeakable joy of those who cleave to God, and the hopeless misery of

those who reject him. Remember the desire of Moses: "O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end" (Deut. xxxii 29).

IV. GOD IS PATIENT

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that, however much he is outraged and despised by his creature, yet he never hates him, but truly loves him and warmly desires his good, although he detests the evil within him. He fulfils the temporal needs even of those who do not pray, and he lavishes his spiritual gifts upon those who wish for them: *He maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust* (Matt. v 45).

We, too, should aspire to this perfection, so that however much a man may harm us we should never hate him, but should wish him every kind of good, and be ever ready to give him whatever temporal or spiritual help he may expect of us. But there is in God a hatred which is good and to be imitated by us. We should never love sins because we love him who commits them, nor because we hate sin should we hate any man. We should love the sinner, but hate his sin.

V. THE JUSTICE OF GOD

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that, as far as he is concerned, no one ever suffers a diminution of good

through the sin of someone else. Thus the fall of Lucifer did no hurt to Michael the Archangel; nor did the treachery of Judas wound the charity of St Peter.

But we wretched men are different. For the sin of one religious we blame the whole community, nay, the whole order: we condemn all religious for the evil in one. If an enemy offends us, we pursue with our hate numberless innocent people; and we upbraid and assault all his children, his relations and friends. This is forbidden in the Law of God (Ezech. xviii 20): *The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father;* but as the Apostle says (Gal. vi 5), *Everyone shall bear his own burden.* And how often it happens, when our soul is troubled, that we render evil to God because we wish neither to sing, study, read nor pray.

VI. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he never puts aside justice for mercy's sake, nor will he ever abandon mercy for justice. He never judges or condemns anyone without mercy, nor is justice ever wounded when he pours out his mercy.

But we, when we strive to keep justice, allow mercy to die within us: and if we open our hearts to mercy, justice straightway vanishes. But Scripture recommends at one and the same time both justice and

mercy (Prov. iii 3): *Let not mercy and truth leave thee, put them about thy neck and write them in the tables of thy heart*; and (Ps. c 1), *Mercy and judgement I will sing to thee, O Lord.*

VII. GOD IS LONG-SUFFERING

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that when all the saints and all creatures call down the vengeance of God upon sinners—as we read in the Apocalypse (vi 10): *And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord (holy and true), dost thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*—God meanwhile, patiently and mercifully, waits for the sinner until death, in order that he may have pity upon him, if he wishes to turn from his evil ways. Because the infinitely merciful God rejoices not in the loss of those to whom he has given life.

But we, in our impatience, curse and denounce the sinner; we cry for vengeance, and we would wish to see him straightway swallowed up even before the grave that awaits him is properly dug. We upbraid God for suffering so long the evil that wicked men work upon the just. We reflect not what great good a wise God can draw from the wickedness of sinners.

God is praiseworthy and wonderful in his patient endurance of sinners. He would have been no more wonderful and praise-

worthy had he preserved the world from sin, or entirely delivered it from iniquity. It is easy enough for him to hurl a wicked man into the pit of hell; but his omnipotence shines forth when he shows mercy and pardons the sinner.

VIII. THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he gives to his creatures all the good he can impart, all the good they have capacity for. And he does this every time his creatures show themselves ready to give him the opportunity. He gives freely even when he sees that his gifts will not bear fruit.

He united human nature with the divine nature in the person of his Son. This was the greatest of all his gifts. To say nothing of his other spiritual gifts, he fashioned the human soul so that it might be capable of receiving within it the Most Holy Trinity; and besides this, he has nourished man's soul with the body and blood of his own beloved Son.

He has withheld nothing that he could give, and in this we have the supreme mark of divine goodness. What he possesses by nature, God imparts to creatures by grace. To the angels he gave bliss, and kept them from the bitter experience of sorrow: to the holy apostles he gave power, so that whatsoever they should bind or loose on earth should be bound or loosed in heaven. To

the prophets he gave the foreknowledge of future things. To the martyrs he gave fortitude in their torments: to the confessors, in prosperity and adversity, he gave constancy: and to the virgins he gave continence in a world of alluring pleasures.

To certain great souls he has communicated spiritually something of what he has by nature. Thus he gave magnanimity to Abraham; meekness to Moses, who was the sweetest of men; to Joseph providence over Egypt; patience to Job and Tobias; to Eliseus the power of raising the dead; the discerning of mysteries to Daniel; to Samuel fidelity; to David mercy towards his persecutors; wisdom to Solomon; to John the Baptist the love of holiness and truth; to the Blessed Virgin humility; charity to Peter; to John the Evangelist chastity; and to the blessed Paul zeal for souls and the knowledge of heavenly secrets. Each excelled in his special gift, though each possessed all the other virtues.

In this way, too, we should give of our abundance one to another. We should give our eyes in order to see for others; our ears to hear confessions; our mouth for preaching and speaking words of encouragement and counsel; our feet to be the swift servants of our neighbour; our hearts with which to meditate for the salvation of their souls.

But still more should we give whatever

we have of spiritual or temporal goods. Whatever it is in our power to do outwardly by good works or inwardly by good will, of whatever we are in body or soul, we should give lavishly to the souls of those in purgatory and of those still living who will soon be no more, so that the will of God may be accomplished in them now and for evermore.

IX. GOD IS GENTLE AND FORGIVING

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he is ready immediately to pardon injuries done to him, no matter how grievous or numerous they be, provided only the sinner firmly and truly purposes amendment. Nay, more, for one only groan from a contrite heart, as the Scripture says (Ps. xxxiii 19), he will forget them altogether. And so long as the heart remains contrite, he will not follow up our sins with vengeance, nor will he put us to confusion and shame with angry scoldings and upbraidings; never will he remind us of them by loving us less, nor will he ever drive us from him by withdrawing his familiar friendship.

But we, who should strive to follow in God's ways, are hardly ever willing to forgive from the heart one little offence, even though the offending one implores pardon and offers satisfaction to the fulness of his power. Or if we do forgive, we

never forget. We rejoice at the humiliation of him who craves forgiveness. If adversity befalls him, we have scant pity for him. And in any case, we usually love him less than before. Even if—which is rare—we do not openly reproach him and complain of the ill he has done us, nevertheless, we will have nothing to do with him, we shut him out from the select circle of our special friends, and sometimes we go so far as to refuse him our counsel and support in his dire need.

Should not we also forget the injuries put upon us, even when evil-doers do not ask pardon or show any signs of sorrow or amendment—after the example of Jesus Christ, when he prayed for his executioners, who were so far from repentance that they mocked him while he prayed?

Nothing makes us so like unto God, says Chrysostom, as the disposition to be easily appeased and to be kind to those who have wronged us and hurt us. As a Gloss on Matthew says: It is the summit of perfection to love our enemies and to pray for them, as the Lord Jesus did.

X. THE MERCY OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he never asks of us more than our strength will permit us to give by way of fasts, prayers, watchings, and alms-deeds, bodily penances, regular observance, and similar things. And if we fail in the great and difficult works that are needful for blot-

ting out our sins, he is satisfied with lesser things, such as the sincere tears of a contrite heart, as we read of Ezechias (Isaias xxxviii 1-8), whose tears were acceptable in the sight of the Lord, and whose death sentence was changed, fifteen years being added to his life. Likewise, he mercifully paid heed to the tears of the blessed Peter, when, hearing the cock crow, he wept bitterly for the grievous sin of denying our Lord. If it happens that one has no tears to give him, a single word springing from a contrite heart is enough for God. Thus we read that to the good thief who said to our Lord: *Remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom*, he answered: *Amen I say to thee: this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise* (Luke xxiii 42, 43). If one should lose the use of his tongue, God will receive the sigh of his heart as full expression of sorrow, according as it is said (Ezech. xviii 21, 22): *If the wicked do penance for all his sins, I shall no more remember all his iniquities*. And if sickness should deprive a man of the use of all his members, so that in his extreme weakness he could not move nor utter a sigh or groan, God would accept his good and sincere will and pardon him the most serious offences.

We, too, should never demand of anyone, whether he be secular or religious, or however he may be bound by vow, more than this: that he faithfully do his best.

XI. THE COMPASSION OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he never reproaches anyone for his natural defects—whether they be bodily defects, such as blindness, deafness, or any deformity; or mental defects, such as stupidity, lack of intelligence, of memory, of reason, of judgement, or natural timidity. On account of defects of this kind, God will not scorn or cast out any man. But with regard to spiritual defects, which anyone with God's help can conquer, he is severely reproachful. He is offended by our ingratitude for all his gifts, by our desire for superfluities, by our sorrow at the success of the just, or our joy in their afflictions, by our hating or opposing good works, by our blackening or lessening the good name of another. He reproaches our obstinate self-love, our refusal to give up our own opinion, our keenness to please men, our hatred of correction, our love of praise, our quest for exterior consolations. He reproaches us when we foster carnal affections and other like things.

We, too, should despise no one if he is lacking in health, bodily integrity, manly vigour, beauty, eloquence, the ability to sing or read well—for these are gifts that no one has of himself.

Let us thank God for those who happily possess them: let us be patient with those

who have them not; and let us, as far as we can, try to supply all their defects.

XII. THE DISCRETION OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he requires much of him unto whom much has been given, as we read in the Gospel (Luke xii 48). He who has been abundantly blessed with temporal goods is required to bestow more abundant alms. He who has been endowed with bodily health and strength should spend himself more in fasts and watchings. Likewise from him who has been forgiven more numerous and graver sins, or who has been preserved from them, a more generous love and more worthy fruits of penance are expected.

Of him to whom he has granted more excellent gifts, God requires more frequent thanksgiving. He who has received nobler gifts, such as virtues, or better natural qualities, such as genius, intelligence, memory and will, or more numerous and more splendid spiritual gifts, such as devotion, an upright conscience, unfailing confidence, spiritual joy, wisdom of speech, a persevering quest for perfection, alertness for good works, purity of intention, zeal for souls and fervour of prayer, the same should be more conspicuous in his gratitude.

And from him whom God, in his kindness, admits more often and in a more intimate manner into the knowledge of his goodness, his eternity. his immensity,

his omnipotence, his liberality, his love, wisdom, mercy, justice, truth, fidelity, patience, humility, sweetness and nobility, from the same he expects a fuller, more frequent and more fervent praise.

In like manner God demands more from him whom he enlightens in the quest and knowledge of greater perfection, and whom he moves to higher achievements and greater progress in the knowledge and practice of perfection.

We should take care, then, to trade with every gift entrusted to us, so that when we have to render account to the Lord, he may not command that what we have be taken away from us, and that, like the unprofitable servant who hid his talent in a napkin, we be cast miserably forth into the exterior darkness.

XIII. THE LAVISHNESS OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he gives to everyone grace according to his capacity. Thus we read in the Gospel (Matt. xxv 15) that *to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to everyone according to his proper ability.*

The more a man's heart is filled with the love of God and his neighbour, and the more his meditations, his fervent prayers, his just desires, his humility and generosity expand his heart towards God, so much the more elevated and the more abundant is

the grace given him by almighty God. And the more diligently he strives to preserve that grace and to make use of it for the praise of God and for the common good, so much the better is he preparing for a still more generous outpouring of grace in this life and eternal glory in the next. Let us therefore open our heart and make it ready by fervent desire so that God, who is *rich unto all that call upon him* (Rom. x 12), may, in his magnificence, flood us with his abounding grace.

He, whose office it is to minister the riches of God by preaching and by counsel, should take diligent heed that he give not that which is holy to dogs, and that he cast not his pearls before swine (Matt. vii 6).

Day unto day uttereth speech: and night to night showeth knowledge (Ps. xviii 3); that is to say, the more perfect things should be given to the perfect, less perfect things to the imperfect, as befits a wise minister. Such a wise minister was St Paul (1 Cor. ii 6), who spoke *wisdom among the perfect*, but to the simple, nothing but Jesus Christ: and him crucified.

XIV. THE JUST JUDGEMENT OF GOD

Another of the ways or perfections of God is that he does not judge the deeds of men as they outwardly appear; but in his immensity and unspeakable wisdom he discerns them all inwardly according to

their inner intention. And it is according to the motive and intention whence men's deeds arise that he accords a severe punishment or an excellent reward.

We, too, should not judge the deeds of men by the outward appearances they present to our eyes and ears. Whether men look upon us with a kind or severe countenance; whether they speak to us courteously or harshly; whether they give us presents or not; in all circumstances, let us strive, as far as we can, not only to take heed of what they do, but also to look to the motive that inspires their deeds, and to regulate our behaviour accordingly. For it is better to put up with the hard words of our true friends who speak only with a good intention and with a desire for our amendment, than to hearken to the suave speech and fair words of flatterers who do not truly love us or seek our amendment, but only crave to please us. *Better are the wounds of a friend than the deceitful kisses of an enemy* (Prov. xxvii 6).

XV. THE TRUTH OF GOD

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he is truthful in his promises. For in our Lord's own words (Luke xvi 17), *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fall.* The Lord Jesus does not speak at random, as we do, but every single word that he has uttered in

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time has been weighed in wisdom from all eternity. And just as he has verified the hard sayings of the Prophets in his incarnation, birth, passion, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost, so too shall he fulfil his promises of the general resurrection and the future judgement of all mankind. Likewise he will keep his word to the poor when he shall raise them up to sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. xix 28). He will keep his word to those that mourn, according to Isaias (lxvi 13): *As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.* He will keep his word to the humble and to the proud when he shall exalt those who have humbled themselves and humble those that were exalted (Matt. xxiii 12). He will keep his word to the oppressed when he shall make them to tread upon the necks of their enemies (Deut. xxxiii 29). For *the Lord is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works* (Ps. cxliv 13), and whatever he has promised he is mighty to accomplish.

We, too, should be truthful in our promises. First of all we should cling faithfully to the promises made in our name by our godparents when we were baptised, which bind us to persevere in the Catholic faith, to renounce the devil and his works and pomps, and to keep the ten Commandments. We should likewise be faithful to whatever other promises we have subsequently made,

whether they be vows of obedience, chastity, abstinence or religion, or whatever they be.

We should be truthful in our dealings with our fellows so that our speech be: *Yea, yea* ; *No, no* (Matt. v 37); that is to say, what we utter with our lips should be mirrored in our heart. If we have promised aught to anyone, or if we are bound in any way to another, be he living or dead, we should not delay to pay our debt of truth and justice; because God will demand truth and will punish those who despise it.

But alas ! how hateful truth is to men—truth which is so very good and in which is the way of salvation for all. He who hates the truth, hates Christ. Those who hate the truth are traitors to truth. St John Chrysostom says: “Not only is he a betrayer of truth who, instead of the truth, openly speaks a lie; but he who does not freely speak the truth when he should, or does not defend it when defence is required, is likewise a traitor to truth.”

XVI. GOD IS NOT A RESPECTER OF PERSONS

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he is not a respecter of persons (Acts x 34). In the old Law it was not the high and mighty, but the lowly that he set as judges over his people; such were Moses, Josue and Gideon. And later on he chose for kingship not the great ones and the mighty, but men of humble stock, such as

Saul the son of Cis, and David, the least among his brethren, whom he raised up from a shepherd's life and set him upon a throne. In the early Church it was not great ones or wise men or noblemen but simple fishermen whom he constituted princes over all the earth, giving into their hands the government of his Church. *The foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things hath God chosen that he may confound the strong* (1 Cor. i 27). Thus, in these days, in dispensing his graces, God does not regard the power, the wealth, the strength, nor the personal beauty of any man. But, as Peter says, *God is not a respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh justice is acceptable to him* (Acts x 34-35). Not only the rich, the illustrious and the comely does he call to his kingdom; but likewise the poor, the blind, the lame, the weak, the infirm and those of low degree does he constrain to enter. Nay, rather it is the lowly who make the greatest progress in the Church of God and are filled more plentifully with spiritual gifts. At the last judgement he will have no regard for the persons of kings and princes; but great and small shall be judged with perfect equity. Each one shall be glorified, not according to his power, or beauty, or worldly degree, but according to the degree of his humility and love.

We should take diligent heed that we do not commit the fault of respecting the person of any man. We should honour a man, as Gregory says, because he is a man, that is, because he is made after the image and likeness of God, not for anything that is merely external, such as riches, costly apparel, power, nobility, or the number of his friends and kinsmen. In Holy Scripture respect of persons is considered a very great fault indeed. God forbid that any preacher should ever in his sermons praise the life of the rich, the mighty or the noble who have their consolation in this world; or condemn without reason the life of the poor and afflicted who send up their groans to heaven. God forbid that any priest should more willingly hear the confession of one because he enjoys the advantages of fortune, social standing, youth or beauty, or because some gain or advantage is to be expected from him. Let the confessor not spend more trouble and time with such favoured folk than he would with those who are old, poor, sick, or of low degree. The need of these latter perhaps is greater. If, indeed, he spends more time with the first, it should be because such men are more exposed to sin than others and because they can draw into evil a greater number of souls.

God forbid that those who distribute alms should show respect for persons. There the alms should be more frequent

and more abundant where the need is greater and more pressing. And those who are more advanced in well-doing should be given the greater help.

In all things we should follow the teaching of the Apostle (Rom. xiii 7): *Render to all men their dues. Tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom: fear to whom fear: honour to whom honour: love to whom love; familiarity to whom familiarity,* according to the degree of holiness, priestly order or dignity in each one.

XVII. OF GOD'S CARE FOR ALL HE HAS CREATED

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he cares for all that he has created—the very smallest as well as the greatest, be they animals, fishes or birds. Two sparrows are sold for a farthing, yet not one is forgotten in the sight of God (Matt. x 29). He cares even for the worms, great and small. He keeps all things in being and continually provides them with all they need for life. He cares for the four elements, for inert matter, for plants and trees and the whole animal world.

But chiefly, and above all, he cares for man whom he has made to his own image and likeness. He has made men the members of his own beloved Son and temples of the Holy Ghost. To each he has deputed a guardian angel. He has fed men with the precious body and blood of his only Son.

He fulfils the needs of all, and what is most wonderful, he supplies the temporal needs of sinners, who are his enemies, more abundantly than those of his friends.

Furthermore, he takes vigilant care of the souls in purgatory, whose penalties are remitted by the offerings of his priests even when those priests should offer unworthily and thereby bring upon themselves condemnation. He also permits the holy souls to be succoured by the desires of the Church triumphant and the suffrages of the Church militant. Although prayers, fastings, alms-deeds, pilgrimages and other good works, done over and above our duty of charity, do not suffice to blot out our own sins, yet we may confidently hope that such good works may, through God's infinite loving-kindness, win for those holy souls who have merited whilst living in this world some solace in their sufferings and some remission of debt.

God has a great solicitude for the holy angels whom he has created and established in bliss, keeping them sacrosanct and immune from all experience of sin or the very shadow of evil.

We, too, should take care of all the creatures of God, using each one according to the order of God's willing, so that at the day of judgement they may not stand forth as witnesses against us. Let us have a tender regard for all men, sharing with them their

joys and sorrows; let us ever seek to restrain them from iniquity and to strengthen them in the Lord by our desires, our prayers and good example. Let us have a care, also, for the souls in purgatory, obtaining for them relief and release by our frequent works of mercy. Let us have regard for the angels so that the joy and reward due to them for guarding, guiding and helping us, may not through our fault be wrested from them.

Lastly, let us above everything else have a tender regard for God, so that always and everywhere we may do what is most pleasing to him and fulfil in all things what he has destined for us.

XVIII. THE EQUANIMITY OF GOD

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he is never disturbed. Nothing can trouble him; and although Scripture often refers to God's anger and fury, that does not mean that God is ever agitated. God is only said to be angry or discomposed metaphorically when he avenges sin or justly withdraws his grace from evil-doers. God is impassible. He has no contrary. His simplicity is so perfect, and he enjoys in his own nature so complete a felicity and such consummate bliss, that no disturbance can ruffle his infinite calm.

We, too, should, so far as we can, avoid all disturbances and excitement, because grace cannot repose in a troubled soul. In

order to avoid external perturbation and to keep the soul in sweet and perfect peace, we must fill our minds and hearts with the thought of God. Love, strong as death, should work in us death unto self, so that seeing the evil deeds of our fellows, we should seem not to see them, and hearing wicked words uttered against us, we should hear them not; nor allow them to flutter our restless hearts. Like David we should be blind, deaf and dumb, as men insensible: *I, as a deaf man, heard not; as a dumb man not opening his mouth* (Ps. xxxvii 14).

Let us yield ourselves faithfully and fervently to the things of God; let us leave others to their own conscience or to the judgement of their superiors or to the final justice of God, who said: *Revenge is mine; I will repay* (Rom. xii 19). Let us take heed that we do not stir up trouble in others lest they in their turn, as often happens, bring trouble and disturbance and torment of conscience upon us. For almighty God, the lover of justice, will not leave unpunished at the last day all those deeds that have sown trouble and brought forth tumult and have diminished the number of holy meditations, just desires, prayers and other good works, and have thus disturbed the peace of the Church in heaven, on earth or in purgatory.

XIX. GOD SEEKS NOT HIS OWN ADVANTAGE

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that in all his works and all that he wills, he has no thought of self-interest; he considers simply and solely the abundance of his own eternal and immense goodness and ordains everything for the greater good of the human race and his holy angels.

In creating and conserving the heavens and the four elements and all that dwell therein, he considers not his own advantage, but that of men and angels. Whatever he arranges in creation, whether he send fine weather or bad weather, whether he give a rich harvest or a poor one, whether he send health or sickness—whatever he does with regard to men, bestowing grace or withholding it, whether he permit men to be healthy, strong, weak or sick, rich or poor, whether he allows them to live or die, whether he gives us good rulers or bad, those who uphold the poor or those who afflict them, those who judge justly or those who pervert judgement—whatever he does, he ordains everything, does everything and permits everything on account of his own infinite goodness and the common good of all mankind.

Likewise in all our desires, prayers, fasts, alms-deeds, in all our works and words, in all we have to endure, let our intention be pure. Without looking to self-interest, without

seeking to please men or fearing to displease them, without fixing our attention unduly upon present grace or future glory, let us consider purely and principally God's admirable goodness, and secondarily the salvation of our fellows. The more purely and ardently we look to God's glory and the less we regard our own advantage—or even that of other men—the more acceptable to God will our work be and the more fruitful to the whole universe of God's creation.

How much is lost to God and the universe when, in our actions, we consider anything but the sheer goodness of God! God with his fan will separate the wheat from the chaff, as John the Baptist has said (Matt. iii 12). In his wisdom he will divide the pure from the impure, he will gather the grain into his barn, the chaff he will burn in unquenchable fire; that is to say, he will winnow our good deeds from our bad and reward only what we have done or endured solely for his love. *The Lord will reward me according to my justice*, says David, *and according to the cleanness of my hands before his eyes* (Ps. xvii 25).

XX. GOD HATH DONE ALL THINGS WELL

It is another of the ways or perfections of God that he has done all things supremely well. The building of the heavens and the earth, the creation of angels, men and all other beings, are such perfect works that it is impossible for us to conceive of a better arranged universe. But above all, sover-

eignly perfect, was the work of redemption which none other but God could accomplish. God was pre-eminently prudent when he overcame the devil by means of the wood of a tree, for it was with the help of a tree that Satan had won his former victory. It was God's wisdom to hide his divine omnipotence under the veil of human frailty, for if the demons had known, *they would never have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Cor. ii 8); that is to say, they would never have persuaded the Jews to do it.

And whatever God does to-day, whether he avenges sin or disregards it because of sorrow, whether he bestows grace or withdraws it from his chosen ones, whether he grants to a faithful soul the grace of his familiar friendship or whether he shows himself a stranger, whether there be wind or rain, heat or cold, whether the ways be dry or flooded, whether there be a fruitful harvest or a failure of crops—whatever happens, it is impossible that things could be better, because God in his immense wisdom and exceeding tender love and kindness knows how to do each thing at the fit and proper moment.

God will reward or punish every deed to the full. For every sin and for every member that has been an instrument of iniquity, he will render a just punishment according to the quantity and grievousness of the sin. Likewise he will reward with justice every act of good will, every word,

every work, every good example, according to the intensity of the supernatural love that has inspired them.

We, too, should set ourselves with all diligence to perform every action as well as we possibly can. We should do everything in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, uniting ourselves with the whole Church, triumphant and militant, and offering all in the name of our Creator. We should act as if the whole glory of God and the good of the universe depended on one single deed, and as if we were never again to return to that work nor commence any other. For each time that we interrupt a work, fervently commenced, with the thought of some other occupation, at once the attention flags with regard to the work in hand. For example, if we are at prayer or engaged in some other good work and we suddenly take it into our head to write or do something else, at once our keenness for the prayer abates and we soon set aside the good work we have begun.

XXI. THE KINDNESS OF GOD

It is another of the ways or perfection of God that he judges no man according to his past or future wickedness or holiness; but according to the present state of his soul. Thus he did not condemn Paul on account of his past malice, nor did he save Judas on account of his former justice.

But we wretched men often recall to mind the past evil ways of our fellows, no matter how much they may have subsequently progressed in virtue and godliness. And if a just man fall from the way of justice, be it only once, and even if he truly repent, yet we never more remember his present holiness.

XXII. THE MERCY OF GOD

Another of God's ways is that, provided one punishment is sufficient and due correction follows, he never punishes twice for the same fault.

But we, most wretched men that we are, for one injury done to us, would, if it were possible, heap upon our enemy a hundred injuries more terrible than we have received.

XXIII. THE SOUL SHOULD CONFORM ITSELF TO GOD

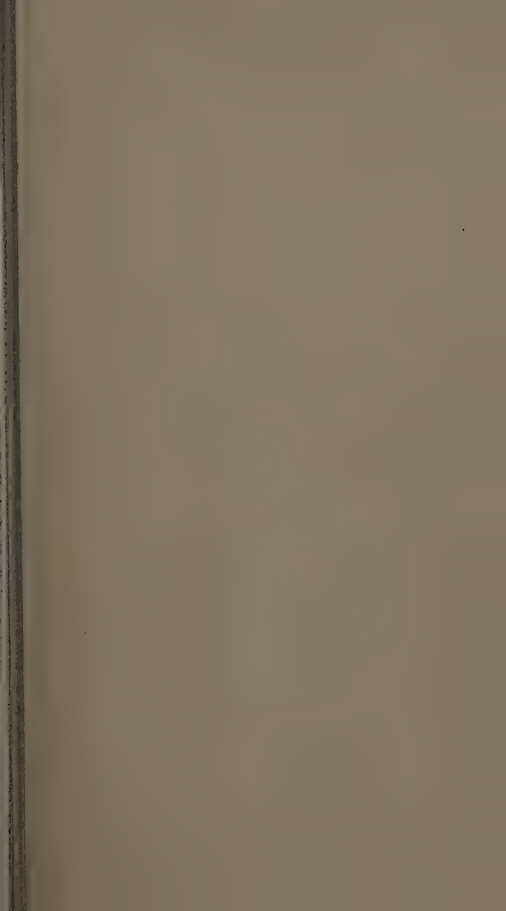
The faithful soul should, as far as possible, use every effort to conform to the ways of God of which we have been speaking. For the more the soul is in accord with God in this world, the more intense will be its bliss hereafter, the more it will glorify God and the more useful it will be to the world. The faithful soul should rejoice exceedingly in the thought that it shall truly have God's ways in eternal life: *When he shall appear, we shall be like to him because we shall see him as he is* (1 John iii 2).

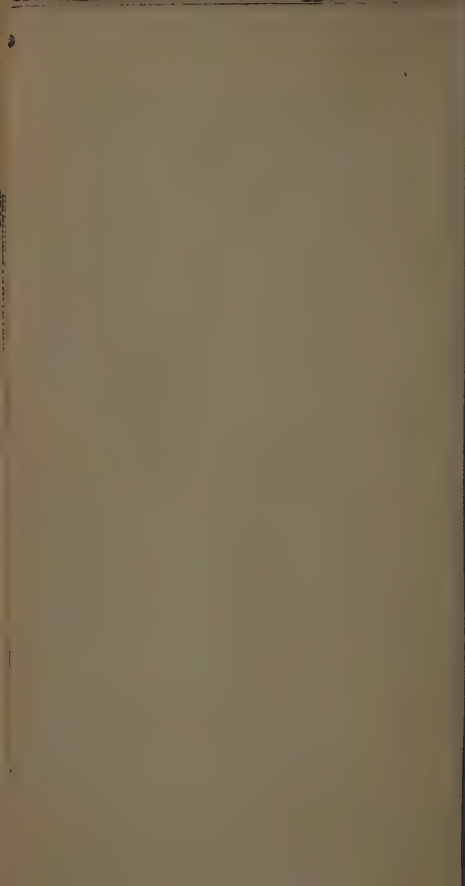
PRAYER

O loving God who, without our deserving it, didst stamp thine image upon the soul, we beg of thee by all that thou art and with all that thou art, that thou wouldest impress thy ways upon us. Let not thy so great toil be lost, nor let us live forlorn and in peril of not arriving whither thine infinite pains for us would truly lead us.

XXIV. WE CANNOT IMITATE GOD IN ALL THINGS

There are in God other ways in which he is not to be imitated, but rather admired. For example, he alone knows the hidden things of the heart; he alone knows and loves himself perfectly; he alone is his own supreme joy and perfect praise; he alone suffices unto himself and has no need of anything outside himself. From him alone all good proceeds; in him alone is the joy of all. *He only hath immortality and dwelleth in light inaccessible* (1 Tim. vi 16). He alone makes something out of nothing; he alone keeps all things in being. He alone forgives sin. He alone knows the hour of the judgement. He alone knows the number of the elect. Blessed be God. Amen.





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